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Labour Bureaucracy and Labour Officialdom in Evo Morales's Bolivia

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ABSTRACT

Evo Morales has labelled his government the 'government of social movements', and much has been written on relations between social movements and the state in Bolivia since the turn of the century. The Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) — Bolivian Workers' Central — has, however, remained largely absent from discussions in much of the literature. This article seeks to analyse the position of the COB under Morales, and to explore the nature and consequences of its relationship with the government over the past 12 years. The article differentiates between the concepts of labour bureaucracy and labour officialdom and examines how they can be used as analytical lenses that shed light on the position of the COB today. The author argues that during Bolivia's neoliberal period (1985–2005) the need to look after the COB bureaucratized union structures, as personal needs of the leadership were placed above those of the Bolivian working classes. This then allowed Morales's government to easily co-opt sections of the labour movements' leadership to form a labour officialdom, leaving the COB unable to challenge the continuation of the neoliberal structure of the economy and represent the majority of the country's working classes.

INTRODUCTION

Since the election of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) — Movement Towards Socialism — in Bolivia in 2005, many scholars have critically examined the integration of social movements into the MAS as the administration attempts to construct a 'government of social movements' (for example Albó, 2015; Crabtree and Chaplin, 2013; Escárzaga, 2012; Farthing and Kohl, 2014; Fontana, 2013a, 2013b; Poweska, 2013; Regalsky, 2010;

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Salazar, 2015). Others have focused on the increasing tensions emerging around territory and extractivism in Bolivia, the debate over the Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Secure (Tipnis) — Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory — being firmly at the centre of this literature (for example Cusicanqui, 2015; Tapia, 2011; Webber, n.d.). The Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) — Bolivian Workers' Central — however, remains understudied in both the Anglophone and Hispanophone literatures. The need to address the current state of the COB became increasingly evident during my fieldwork in the Bolivian cities of El Alto, La Paz and Santa Cruz between January 2016 and May 2017. While there, I regularly attended meetings of the COB, the neighbourhood councils and the market guilds. I marched with workers from various sectors, including during the days of the general strike called by the COB, had countless informal conversations with rank-and-file workers and conducted more than 100 interviews with formal social movement leaders, government officials and political activists. Throughout this period the COB was an omnipresent social force, making its absence in the literature puzzling.

The goal of this article is to address this lacuna by analysing the COB under the MAS regime from 2006 to the present day. It explores how the leadership of the COB has become assimilated into the political project of the MAS, using the distinction between 'labour bureaucracy' and 'labour officialdom'. A 'labour bureaucracy' emerges when a particular configuration of internal social relations comprising a formalized union structure limits the actions of union leadership and rank and file alike (Hyman, 1989: 246); a 'labour officialdom' is a group of self-interested individual labour leaders whose personal interests have come to replace the concerns of their working class bases. This article uses these two concepts to explore the relationship between institutional dynamics and political economy, arguing that the COB was bureaucratized during Bolivia's neoliberal period (1985–2005) as the need for the COB to 'look after' [*cuidar*] itself impinged on its ability to represent rank-and-file workers and adapt to neoliberal economic restructuring.[1] This self-interested focus on survival allowed the MAS to construct corporatist relationships with the COB, aligning the personal interests of the union leaders with those of the MAS, creating a *MASista* labour officialdom.[2] Consequently, the COB is unable to represent the majority of the working classes as neoliberal trends within the economy and labour market continue.

1. Here Bolivia's neoliberal period denotes the years 1985–2005, when governments were following neoliberal policies. Neoliberal trends in the labour market and political economy more generally have, however, continued beyond this period and into the years of Morales's government.
2. I follow Philippe Schmitter's (1974: 86) classic definition of corporatism as a 'particular modal or ideal-typical institutional arrangement for linking the associationally organized interests of civil society with the decisional structures of the state'.

The structure of the article is as follows. Firstly I define how the working classes are understood here. Secondly, I outline the theoretical concepts of labour bureaucracy and labour officialdom. Thirdly, I sketch the position of the COB during the period of the National Revolutionary State (1952–85). Fourthly, I explore some of the changes to the Bolivian working classes, and political economy more generally, galvanized by neoliberal reforms. Fifthly, I briefly profile the GDP contribution of different economic sectors and the structure of urban working classes. Sixthly, I examine the ways in which union structures have become co-opted under the MAS, and how the government has aligned the personal interests of leaders with their own political project, creating a labour officialdom. Finally, I highlight some of the detrimental effects the creation of this MAS labour officialdom has had on the ability of the COB to represent the working-class rank and file.

DEFINING THE WORKING CLASSES

The term 'working classes' as used in this article denotes people who do not control the key productive resources of a society and thus are either directly or indirectly dependent on the sale of labour power for their daily reproduction (Sears, 2014; Selwyn, 2016). The capitalist production process not only generates commodities but also the conditions in which classes form (Lebowitz, 2003). Classes are not formed mechanically through the structural conditions of the production process, however. The working classes include not just those who enter the workplace but the swathes of unemployed who were and will again be wage-earners and those who appear self-employed but who are, in fact, disguised wage labourers earning just enough to sustain themselves. The working classes are marked by 'extensive and complicated "grey areas", replete with transitional locations between the "free" wage laborers and slaves, the self-employed and the lumpenproletarians' (van der Linden, 2008: 32). They also include those whose survival is indirectly dependent on wage labour — family dependants, (mostly) women and children — and who provide the conditions for production through unpaid tasks that reproduce wage labour on a daily and generational basis (Camfield, 2011: 1–2). As E.P. Thomson (1978: 150) argues, class 'eventuates as men and women *live* their productive relations, and as they *experience* their determinate situations' (emphasis in original).

Following the work of Erik Olin Wright (2000) and Beverly Silver (2003), Benjamin Selwyn uses this processual and relational definition of class to evaluate the structural and associational power of trade unions. Structural power denominates the 'workers' position in the production process and their ability to disrupt it', whereas associational power refers to 'workers' collective organization, more often than not via trade unions' (Selwyn, 2014: 101). While structural power is important in understanding the efficacy of

certain sectors of the working classes, it does not explain why particular sectors of workers are more or less well organized and capable of defending their interests at different times, for this is determined by the *experience* of class. These two concepts of structural and associational power help us connect the concrete abstraction of class to specific historical dynamics, and in this particular case, help discern the evolution of the strength and radicalism of different sectors within the COB.

LABOUR BUREAUCRACY AND LABOUR OFFICIALDOM

The heuristic devices of 'labour bureaucracy' and 'labour officialdom' help to reveal the interaction between institutional dynamics and political economy. As the logic of capital spreads across society, it places exigencies on both labour (the need to find paid work in order to survive) and capital (the requirement for the continual self-valorization of value through competition) (Marx, 1867/1982: 301). The incessant need for capital to reproduce itself leads to a division of labour, particularly into manual and intellectual tasks. This division of labour spreads across society as the productive capacity of capital grows (Marx, 1849/1935: 52). The separation of intellectual and manual labour under capitalism has led to the separation of 'the activity of conceptualising the goals and methods of human activity from its execution', placing constraints on the productive activity of workers' manual labour (Camfield, 2013: 139). It is not the separation of intellectual and manual labour itself that defines bureaucracy, but what this separation has enabled. The monopolization of intellectual labour — ideas and plans that are put into practice by manual labour — has allowed a group of individuals charged with decision making to impose rules and regulations on those who are put to task materializing their ideas (ibid.: 140).

Bureaucracy is, therefore, 'a mode of existence of social relations in which people's activity is organized through formal rules that limit their ability to determine its character and goals, and which they themselves are not able to alter with ease' (Camfield, 2009: 188). Not all rules are necessarily bureaucratic, only those that impinge on people's ability to determine and realize their own goals. This definition avoids casting structural constraints facing trade unions as monolithic, overdetermining factors by delineating a dialectical relationship between 'structure' and 'struggle' (Hurl, 2009: 142), as well as disentangling 'labour officialdom' from 'labour bureaucracy' (Camfield, 2013: 134–38).

Labour bureaucracy, as distinct from bureaucracy more generally, arises from the social relations out of which trade unions form: wage labour. 'The origins of the labour bureaucracy', asserts Charles Post (2005: 3), can be found 'in the episodic and discontinuous character of working-class struggle under capitalism'. The working classes are constrained by the need to

reproduce themselves through earning a wage.[3] They must enter the workplace to survive, restricting the time and energy they possess to engage in political struggles to transform society. According to Rosa Luxemburg (1906/2004: 180), the working classes can therefore start their struggle in one of the places where they live class — the workplace.[4] Under the right conditions it is possible for economic demands to be transformed into political demands, and radical political projects can emerge out of labour unions. However, if the integral rules, regulations or decision-making processes of a union come to restrict class struggle, its labour bureaucracy inhibits the union.

The labour leadership is not necessarily a self-interested faction of the working classes, and does not always become a labour officialdom. However, if the union structure has become bureaucratized, there is always 'the risk that working-class organisations will themselves become divided between layers exercising different functions. Specialisation can result in a growing monopoly of knowledge, of centralized information. Knowledge is power, and a monopoly of it leads to power over people ... if not checked, [this can] mean a real division between new bosses and the bossed-over mass' (Mandel, 1992: 59–60; cited in Post, 2005: 4). The separation of a group of leaders from the rank and file 'privatizes' the collective will of the working classes as these leaders monopolize the centralized knowledge of the union. Labour leaders who grow separated from the movement they represent become detached from the lived experience of class, and come to represent the objectification of the labour movement: the labour bureaucracy. The danger contained in the division between the labour leadership and rank and file lies in the separation of planning and conception from execution. Under certain conditions this separation allows the particular interests of individual leaders to supplant the collective will of the working classes. In other words, a labour leadership that is separated from its base risks becoming a labour officialdom, advocating its own will rather than the demands of the masses.

THE FORMATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE COB

Between 1952 and 1985, the period of the National Revolutionary State, the COB was an integral part of the Bolivian society and nation (García Linera,

3. This reproduction includes the basic requirements of food, clothes and sleep needed to get the labourer to the workplace from one day to the next, the generational reproduction of the workforce through biological reproduction, and the fostering and maintenance of social relationships and practices that reproduce society as a whole. See Tithi Bhattacharya's (2017) excellent edited collection on social reproduction theory for more detail.
4. It is important to stress the workplace is only *one* place where class is experienced. In her seminal book on Bolivian miners, June Nash (1993) shows the importance of the family and the community as sites where class is also lived.

2014).[5] The COB was formed after the 1952 nationalist-populist revolution and subsequently entered into co-government with the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) — National Revolutionary Movement — between 1952 and 1957 (Hylton and Thomson, 2007). Critical Marxist René Zavaleta Mercado was one of the most lucid thinkers to tackle this period of Bolivian history. He argues that in Bolivia, the modern forms of the state, nation and society (historical formations in Zavaleta's schema) emerged through the *crossing* (not replacement) of national sentiment and class sentiment through the MNR and the COB (Zavaleta, 2009: 156). The history of Bolivia before the 1952 revolution was one of antagonism between the nation and an outward-facing oligarchy (or in the worst cases simply foreign oligarchs), leading to a nation that was composed of subaltern classes.

The working class movement in Bolivia and its institutional expression, the COB, were therefore intimately tied to the project of nation building and the state form of the National Revolution of 1952, regardless of the regime type (civil or military). Dominated by the miners, the most radical section of Bolivian society at the time, the COB headed struggles against the military dictatorships between 1964 and 1982, even during periods of extreme state repression and exile of the COB's leadership. During this period the radicalism of the Bolivian working classes radiated out of the mining centres because of the structural power and the ideological formation of the miners (Zavaleta, 2009; see also Nash, 1993). Despite numbering only 53,000 in 1952 — approximately 3 per cent of the total population — the miners were responsible for the production of 95 per cent of foreign exports and 45 per cent of government revenue (Hylton and Thomson, 2007: 78). The deep-seated tradition of trade union organization and militancy within the mines transformed the structural power of the miners into associational power which extended beyond their sector and allowed the COB to demonstrate class independence from the state at particular moments, such as the revolution of 1952 itself, the protests against the coup d'ètat of Alberto Natusch in 1979 and in their rejection of co-government in 1982. One sign of the COB's power during this period was the formation of the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB) — Trade Union Confederation of Bolivian Peasant Workers — where the peasant federation formally broke their pact with the military and became part of the COB (Cusicanqui, 2003). However, as Zavaleta also noted, the COB often became tangled up in the dynamics of the National Revolutionary State — which was determined to create a national bourgeoisie — through corporatist relations, which restricted its ability to pursue a revolutionary project. This left the COB unable to extend working class power throughout the country even in moments of crisis in bourgeois hegemony, particularly the Bonapartist

5. Although the work of García Linera is now overdetermined by his political function as vice-president (see Baker 2015; McNelly, 2017; Webber, 2015), his early work, especially on the Bolivian labour movement (republished in 2014), represented vital interventions.

moment following the 1952 revolution and the Popular Assembly of 1971 (Ouviña, 2016).[6] There were thus moments of revolutionary potential for the working classes that were not capitalized upon by the COB, which proved unable to produce a subjective consciousness of a national class uniting all the disparate subaltern groups of the Bolivian 'nation' (Ouviña, 2016: 69).

The structure of the COB reflects the historical power of certain sectors, particularly the miners, during the era of the National Revolutionary state. The Executive Secretary is always a miner, and the second in command, the General Secretary, is drawn from the factory workers. The COB is hierarchically divided into three levels: (1) the Comité Ejecutivo Nacional (CEN) — National Executive Committee; (2) the sectoral confederations and federations and regional centrals, the Central Obrera Departmentales (CODs) — Departmental Workers' Centrals — and the Central Obrera Regionales (CORs) — Regional Workers' Centrals; and (3) individual unions (García Linera et al., 2004). The COB purports to be the 'unity of the working classes' and, due to its size, it needs rules, regulations and a hierarchical structure (ibid.: 46). The CEN is the centre of decision making in the COB, but is held to account by the dependency of the leaders on the bases: since the organization's power comes from the threat of mobilization, the leadership of the COB is only as powerful as its capacity to mobilize Bolivia's working classes (García Linera et al., 2004). The organizational structure of the COB enables it to operate across the entire country and engage the state directly as the representative of the Bolivian working classes. Moreover, this centralized labour organization can coordinate nationwide actions — by disseminating demands and strategies through sectoral federations and the regional centrals — and mount enough pressure to have influence on the government itself.

THE WORKING CLASSES DURING THE NEOLIBERAL PERIOD

Neoliberalism, which arrived in Bolivia in 1985, introduced a period of massive proletarianization, in which both peasants from rural areas and women were drawn into the labour force, increasing the size of the economically active population (EAP) in the country by 50 per cent between 1989 and 1995 (Arze and Maita, 2000: 36). This burgeoning reserve army of labour made it 'possible for capital to use "the informal sector" to complete the circuit of capital', obscuring wage-labour relations, cheapening the price of labour and producing underemployment (Lebowitz, 2009: n.p.).[7] The

6. See Zavaleta (2009) for an explanation of the Bonapartist moment of the 1952 revolution.
7. Bolivia's Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Laboral y Agrario (CEDLA) — Centre for Labour and Agrarian Development Studies — defines underemployment as either when someone works fewer hours per week than they wish or when there are qualitative deficiencies in employment, such as low levels of income, inadequate tasks for the worker's skill

experience of class in Bolivia was transformed drastically under neoliberalism,[8] with exploitation growing through increasing informality and precarity experienced by workers.[9] Fixed, formal contracts were replaced by short-term work, fixed wages by piecemeal rates and the well-defined boundaries of businesses by networks of outsourced companies (Arze and Maita, 2000). The public sector was reduced to a bare minimum and the workers of the state mining company Corporación Minera de Bolivia (Comibol) — Mining Corporation of Bolivia — were dismissed, forcing most relocated miners into urban areas.

The neoliberalized economy in Bolivia comprised 10 large-scale firms, 100 foreign and domestic financial groups, a smattering of industrial producers and some 500,000 microcompanies employing one to four people and working mainly in commerce, transport and agriculture (Grebe López, 1998: 8–9). Dynamics of intra-class stratification in the half-million microfirms intensified during this period, blurring the distinction between capitalists and wage labourers (Breman, 2015). Informalized workers in the street markets and workshops where the majority of these microcompanies are based have even come to think of themselves as independent operators, a symptom of the extent of the domination of capital over labour under neoliberalism (Lebowitz, 2009).

One of the facets of neoliberal reform was to wrestle the control of state-owned enterprises from the COB, and the government literally starved the miners out of the mining encampments, massively depleting the influence of the COB in the process. The COB always had a rigid hierarchical organizational structure, but due to the structural power and radicalism of its core — the miners — the organization's leadership was able to maintain its connection with its bases, even when leaders were forced into exile by the dictatorships (1964–1982) and the COB assumed a clandestine form. The miners' disappearance as political actors led to a conservative current within the COB, which was unable to see an alternative beyond neoliberalism (Castro López et al., 2012). Such was the weakening of the COB that many labour leaders concerned themselves with its organizational reproduction, leading to processes of increased bureaucratization. In the worst cases, such as the railway workers, neoliberal reform eliminated rank-and-file workers, leaving the CEN leadership as an empty shell.[10] The defensive position of

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set or low labour productivity. See the methodology annex in CEDLA-ILDIS (1995) for a fuller discussion on underemployment.

8. A confluence of hidden wage labour, non-capitalist relations and high levels of precarity have always characterized the working conditions of the peasantry. Neoliberalism increased the size of the working classes and the urban informal economy, however, transforming the experience of class for many Bolivians who were formerly peasants.
9. Escóbar de Pabón et al. (2014: 35) argue that different levels of precarity are determined by wages, job security and access to social security.
10. Author interview with Lucio González, leader within the COB during the 1980s and 1990s, La Paz, 15 March 2016. See also Fornillo (2011); García Linera et al. (2004).

some labour leaders during this period benefited political parties, who agreed deals with individual leaders and came to influence the inner dynamics of the CEN (García Linera et al., 2004: 77). Indeed, then-leader Oscar Salas struck a bargain with the Jaime Paz Zamora government (1988–1993), severely limiting the ability of the CEN to oppose the first privatization drive. Although different sectors vehemently resisted such changes, the COB was unable to unify diverse interests and mount a defence against neoliberal policies (ibid.: 76). In short, neoliberalism helped form a labour bureaucracy within the COB.

The COB did not disappear entirely, however, and teachers, struggling to prevent educational reforms, and workers of the Caja Nacional de Salud (National Health Fund), fighting against the privatization of healthcare, led the struggles of the labour movement from the time of the presidency of Jaime Paz Zamora onwards.[11] The social struggles that erupted between 2000 and 2005 replaced the pro-neoliberal COB leaders with an anti-neoliberal bloc led by Jaime Solares (Castro López et al., 2012). Under this new radical leadership the COB played an important part in the struggles against neoliberalism in 2003, although it was no longer the protagonist in social protest. The COB's programme of struggle, published in September 2003, would form the foundation of the October Agenda, the set of demands at the heart of the Gas War during October 2003. The Gas War was the apogee of the social struggles against neoliberalism between 2000 and 2005, and saw a coalition of neighbourhood associations, indigenous movements, labour unions and market vendors lock down the city of El Alto for more than two weeks, ending only when neoliberal president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada left the country (Webber, 2011). Workers from the mining centre Huanuni were central actors during the Gas War, and Sánchez de Lozada only resigned after he heard that the army had allowed 58 trucks of miners to pass a checkpoint on their way to La Paz (Dunkerley, 2007: 139). The election of Evo Morales in 2005 was the parliamentary expression of these struggles.

THE URBAN WORKING CLASSES IN CONTEMPORARY BOLIVIA

In Bolivia today most economic activity is focused along the tri-city axis of La Paz/El Alto–Cochabamba–Santa Cruz (which replaced the old axis of La Paz–Oruro–Potosí in the 1970s) (Klein, 2003). These three departments have been responsible for the production of around 70 per cent of GDP over the past 15 years (Escóbar de Pabón et al., 2014: 22). Of the approximately 11 million Bolivians, 7.1 million live in the three departments in which the axis cities are contained, so they give a fairly representative picture of the

11. Author interview with Lucio González, La Paz, 15 March 2016; see also García Linera et al. (2004).

Table 1. Annual Growth in GDP by Economic Activity, Bolivia 1989–2016 (%)

Economic Activity	1989–97	1998–2005	2006–12	2013–16	1989–2005	2006–16
GDP (at market price)	**4.28**	**2.93**	**4.76**	**4.87**	**3.64**	**5.49**
GDP (at basic price)	**4.23**	**2.79**	**4.51**	**4.58**	**3.55**	**5.17**
1. Mining and Hydrocarbons	5.14	4.49	6.79	2.70	4.84	6.05
2. Manufacturing Industries	4.54	2.83	4.82	4.91	3.74	5.47
3. Electricity, Gas and Water	7.43	2.58	5.51	5.88	5.15	6.15
4. Construction	5.84	1.10	9.45	7.61	3.61	9.78
5. Commerce	4.60	2.20	4.36	4.27	3.47	4.72
6. Transport and Communications	6.31	3.34	4.84	5.21	4.91	5.65
7. Financial Services and Business	5.57	2.23	5.89	6.45	3.99	6.63
8. Services	3.40	2.72	3.49	5.41	3.08	6.3
9. Agriculture	3.59	2.45	2.31	4.18	3.05	3.29
Extractive/Primary Sector (1)	5.14	4.49	6.79	2.70	4.84	6.05
Secondary Sector (2, 3 and 4)	5.94	2.17	6.59	6.30	4.16	7.13
Services/Tertiary Sector (5, 6, 7 and 8)	4.97	2.62	5.07	5.69	3.86	5.83

Source: adapted from website of the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) — National Institute of Statistics: www.ine.gob.bo/ (accessed 10 April 2017).

Table 2. Axis Cities: Waged and Non-waged Employment Growth by Economic Activity (%)

	Average Annual Growth					
	2001–07			2008–11		
Economic Activity	**Total**	**Waged**	**Non-waged**	**Total**	**Waged**	**Non-waged**
Total	**3.6**	**5.1**	**1.6**	**3.5**	**2.4**	**4.7**
1. Mining and Hydrocarbons	3.8	−3.2	27.4	0.3	−5.0	24.8
2. Manufacturing Industries	4.6	5.1	4.0	3.1	3.5	2.7
3. Electricity, Gas and Water	3.2	3.2	0	2.3	2.3	0
4. Construction	5.8	8.2	1.6	10.2	6.2	17.3
5. Commerce	−3.7	−1.6	−4.5	3.5	5.2	2.8
6. Transport and Communications	5.7	2.4	10.3	5.7	−2.5	14.8
7. Financial Services and Business	3.9	3.2	5.4	−1.0	0.1	−2.7
8. Services	9.1	8.1	13.5	1.9	1.4	4.7
Extractive/Primary Sector (1)	3.8	−3.2	27.4	0.3	−5.0	24.8
Manufacturing/Secondary Sector (2, 3 and 4)	4.9	6.2	3.4	4.9	4.3	5.5
Services/Tertiary Sector (5, 6, 7 and 8)	3.1	4.9	0.9	3.0	1.8	4.3

Source: Escóbar de Pabón et al. (2014: 28).

Bolivian urban working classes as a whole (INE, 2015). Tables 1 to 4 offer some background quantitative data: Table 1 presents GDP growth broken down by sector over the period 1989–2016; Table 2 examines the growth of waged and non-waged employment for different economic sectors; and Tables 3 and 4 give an overview of the percentage of workers employed in each sector and whether they are waged or not.

Despite a discursive emphasis on change and '21st century socialism', the structure of Bolivia's economy has generally continued in a similar manner under Evo Morales to that of the preceding period. As Table 1 shows, average

Table 3. Axis Cities: Employment by Economic Activity, 2001–11 (%)

Economic Activity	2001	2007	2008	2011
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
1. Mining and Hydrocarbons	0.6	0.6	1.0	0.9
2. Manufacturing Industries	17.0	18.0	20.7	20.5
3. Electricity, Gas and Water	0.4	0.2	0.5	0.4
4. Construction	7.9	9.1	6.4	8.0
5. Commerce	35.6	28.2	35.0	34.5
6. Transport and Communications	8.0	9.2	9.6	10.4
7. Financial Services and Business	7.5	7.7	6.6	5.6
8. Services	23.0	26.9	20.3	19.7
Extractive/Primary Sector (1)	0.6	0.6	1.0	0.9
Manufacturing/Secondary Sector (2, 3 and 4)	25.3	27.4	27.6	28.9
Services/Tertiary Sector (5, 6, 7 and 8)	74.1	72.0	71.5	70.2

Source: Escóbar de Pabón et al. (2014: 25)

Table 4. Axis Cities: Rate of Waged Employment by Economic Activity, 2001–11 (%)

	Rate of Waged Employment				Var %	
Economic Activity	**2001**	**2007**	**2008**	**2011**	**2001–07**	**2008–11**
Total	**50.4**	**57.8**	**52.7**	**51.0**	**7.4**	**−1.7**
1. Mining and Hydrocarbons	90.1	59.2	88.1	75.1	−30.9	−12.9
2. Manufacturing Industries	50.2	51.8	48.1	48.7	1.6	0.6
3. Electricity, Gas and Water	84	100.0	100.0	100.0	16.0	0.0
4. Construction	59.6	68.7	67.9	60.3	9.1	−7.6
5. Commerce	24.8	28.8	28.1	29.5	4.0	1.4
6. Transport and Communications	63.5	52.2	59.2	46.4	−11.3	−12.8
7. Financial Services and Business	65.6	66.7	60.4	62.4	1.1	2.0
8. Services	69.3	78.2	85.7	84.4	8.9	−1.3
Extractive/Primary Sector (1)	90.1	59.2	88.1	75.1	−30.9	−12.9
Manufacturing/Secondary Sector (2, 3 and 4)	53.6	57.8	53.5	52.6	4.2	−0.9
Services/Tertiary Sector (5, 6, 7 and 8)	50.9	71.5	51.9	50.0	20.6	−1

Source: Escóbar de Pabón et al. (2014: 29)

GDP growth was greater over the period 2006–16 than 1989–2005, averaging 5.49 per cent compared to 3.64 per cent. With a few exceptions, however, the growth patterns across sectors continued in a similar manner during this period (see Table 1). Although the extractive industry has continued to be important, growing at just over 6 per cent annually between 2006 and 2016, low global oil prices in recent years have had a knock-on effect on both natural gas and mineral prices in the global market, meaning that the extractive sector registered a negative growth rate over the 2015–16 period (see Table 1).[12]

The secondary sector (manufacturing, utilities and construction) has shown the fastest growth over the last decade, at 7.13 per cent. There are

12. In Bolivia, natural gas rather than oil is the most important hydrocarbon resource.

a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the part of the manufacturing sector with direct linkages to the extractive industries has grown impressively, with industries linked to the processing of hydrocarbons and non-metallic minerals growing at over 6 and 9 per cent respectively.[13] The overall growth figure of 5.47 per cent in the manufacturing industry, however, obscures the poor growth rate in the textiles industry (below 2 per cent annually), which employs more people than the extractive industry. Moreover, the secondary sector's growth rate is inflated by the high growth rate in the construction sector (9.78 per cent compared to 3.61 per cent previously), driven by state expenditure on large-scale infrastructure projects, as well as the construction boom in the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. Planned state expenditure between 2010 and 2015 on electrical energy and transport (the infrastructure required by transnational capital involved in extractivism) represented 20.05 per cent and 17.05 per cent respectively (Salazar, 2015: 263).[14] The tertiary sector (commerce, financial services and services) has also grown at almost 6 per cent and all of the urban sectors have outperformed the sectoral growth in agriculture, which languishes behind at 3.29 per cent annually over the 10-year period. Commerce and services do not contribute directly to capital production, however — although, as political economist Jeffery Webber (2016: 1868) highlights, they do provide the conditions for its reproduction — and represent the circulation of pre-existing capital that concentrates at certain places rather than productive activities. Their growth rates are explained by underemployment and overall conditions of informality allowing for the flexibility of capital rather than an increase in investment or productivity.

The extractive industries have increased their share of Bolivian exports under Morales but employ few workers and are poorly integrated into the Bolivian economy. Table 2 shows that job creation in the extractive industries is small, with only 0.3 per cent employment growth in the sector between 2008 and 2011. Despite the profitable nature of the sector, it continues to employ less than 1 per cent of the labour force (see Table 3.). While the relatively small number of miners did not prevent them from being a political force during the National Revolutionary period, today most employment in mining is non-waged (through cooperatives) and precarious, with the four large-scale capital-intensive operations responsible for the bulk of mineral exports offering few employment opportunities (Díaz-Cuellar, 2017: 123).[15] Waged employment growth has been negative in this sector, and the

13. Figures from the website of the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) — National Institute of Statistics: www.ine.gob.bo/ (accessed 10 April 2017).
14. Roads do also provide infrastructure for healthcare and education services that have improved the lives of many rural people. However, as the conflict over the road through the Tipnis national park has shown, roads are built not to provide these services to the greatest number of people but as a part of a wider regional infrastructure project aimed at creating the conditions for extractivism (Salazar, 2015: 262–64; see also Zibechi, 2012).
15. These four operations are Sinchi Wayra, San Cristóbal, Manquiri and Panamerican Silver.

state-employed miners represented in the COB are a minority and dependent on the state for their survival. Huanuni, the only mine fully run by the Comibol, went bankrupt in 2002 and only passed into the government's control in 2007, when it was nationalized along with the Vinto sink-and-float plant (Díaz-Cuellar, 2012). It remains inefficient, both in terms of technology and the number of miners it employs, and depends on state subsidies for its survival — the latest of which was a US$ 36 million investment by the MAS government in 2016 (Página Siete, 2017).

The gas workers find themselves in a similar position. During the neoliberal period, cut-rate royalty and taxation schemes and the agreement to build a pipeline to connect Bolivian gas reserves with large Brazilian markets incentivized investment in Bolivia's hydrocarbons sector, which replaced mining as the major source of state revenue (Kaup, 2014). However, private investment was focused on developing Bolivia's known reserves rather than on exploration, creating few jobs (Kaup, 2014: 1844). The 'nationalization' of hydrocarbons in 2006 and the re-centring of the state hydrocarbons firm Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales de Bolivia (YPFB) — Bolivian State Petroleum Company — as the main player and obligatory partner to transnational firms in exploration increased employment in the sector. Old hydrocarbons workers who had lost their jobs during the 1990s were re-hired by YPFB, and thus became dependent for employment on future exploration of possible reserves led by the state (Kaup, 2014).

Today, the COB is operating in an increasingly informalized labour market detached from the sectors producing GDP growth. The COB, in accordance with its historical modus operandi, represents only waged workers employed with a fixed contract, so many of the non-waged urban working classes remain unrepresented by the labour central.[16] The transport and communications (5.7 per cent) and construction (10.2 per cent) sectors were the only two sectors to create more jobs than the average (3.5 per cent). In both cases, however, most of this employment growth was accounted for by non-waged employment: waged employment growth was actually negative in the transport and communications sector. Overall, waged employment (2.4 per cent) has grown at half the rate of non-waged employment (4.9 per cent), and although the proportion of waged workers increased by 7.4 per cent between 2001 and 2007, it decreased by 1.7 per cent between 2008 and 2011 (see Table 4). The majority of people (over 70 per cent) continue

16. Work on informal markets in Bolivia has argued that informalized street and market vendors and artisanal producers are organized not through labour unions, but through market guilds which operate independently of both the COB and the state (see Tassi et al., 2013; Tassi et al., 2015). This argument appears to be corroborated by my experiences with the COB. Whilst market vendors and merchants (especially those in La Paz's twin city of El Alto) have a *formal* affiliation with the COB through regional centrals and vendor unions, these groups were absent from the four *ampliados* (national meetings) that I attended, and were not present on the marches of the COB during the general strikes in June and July 2016 (Author's fieldnotes January 2016–May 2017).

to be employed in the tertiary sector, which has (approximately) the same structure as when it was consolidated during the 1990s.[17] Most of the urban working classes work in services, commerce or transport. Whereas 85 per cent of employees in the service sector are waged, this is true for only 30 per cent involved in commercial activities (see Table 4). Overall, this means the labour movement has lost the structural power it once had. This does not mean it is irrelevant, however, but rather highlights the change in its position within Bolivian society.

LABOUR OFFICIALDOM UNDER THE MAS: CO-OPTATION AND DEMOBILIZATION

Under the MAS there has been a shift in relations between the government and labour movements in Bolivia. Over the last decade, relations with the government have consolidated the bureaucratization of the labour union structures started under neoliberalism. The COB has been increasingly affected by its political alliances with the government, leading to the formation of a *MASista* labour officialdom within the COB. The MAS government has worked hard to maintain good relations with the labour movement, and the COB has become an important ally, offering support in the press and, equally importantly, not marching against the government when policy is announced. This relationship reached its apogee in November 2013, when the COB signed an agreement, ratified in an *ampliado* (national meeting) of the COB in Santa Cruz, which formalized the COB's support for the MAS government.[18] Executive secretaries have been offered positions with the MAS political party when they finish their leadership terms inside the COB. Leaders have been invited to meetings with government ministers and been given a chance to help shape government projects.

The Labour Officialdom of the MAS

The MASista labour officialdom does not control the whole of the COB, which still contains critics of the government, but it does include the more important positions of power, including members of the executive committee, the leaders of the miners and construction workers (who are building all the large-scale infrastructure projects), some of the leaders of the factory

17. See Arze and Maita (2000). I have not included labour market data from the 1990s in my tables as the categories used in the household surveys are not directly comparable to the later surveys.
18. Author interview with Valerio Ayaviri Lazaro, Executive Secretary of the Construction Workers' Confederation.

workers and the leaders of the CODs.[19] Why this group has emerged within the COB can be gleaned through an examination of some of the trends within the labour movement over the past 10 years.

One of the most visible signs that a labour officialdom explicitly connected to the MAS is emerging is the absorption of former leaders of the labour movement into the MAS political party, a number of whom have served as ministers or deputies for the government. José Pimentel, leader of La Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (FSTMB) — the Trade Union Federation of Bolivian Mineworkers — between 1980 and 1988, was the Minister of Mines and Metallurgy between 2010 and 2012; Walter Delgadillo, the Executive Secretary of the COB in 1985, became the Minister of Work and Employment between 2007 and 2009, and then of Public Works from 2009 to 2011; Guillermo Dalence was a mining leader who became Minister of Mines and Metallurgy between 2006 and 2007; he was succeeded by Alberto Echazú, one of the COB's executive committee during the 1980s.[20] The MAS government has integrated past labour leaders into its government in part to neutralise the risk of experienced leaders organizing or offering advice to any opposition to the government that could come from some sections of the labour movement. It has tied figureheads of the labour movement to the political project of the MAS and used pre-existing personal relationships to influence the COB.

The integration of important figures from inside the labour movement is not constrained to former leaders, with even current leaders inside the COB being offered *pegas* — the colloquial term for positions of power given for political reasons — by the MAS. This has become a common story within the COB (and other social organizations) recently, with the government offering generous political positions or projects in return for support for the MAS government; and it has undoubtedly been a contributing factor in the co-optation of the labour movement over the past 10 years. A number of leaders within the COB lament leaders being bought by the MAS, citing this as the underlying factor inhibiting the mobilization of certain sectors.[21] The clearest example of porous boundaries between the COB and the MAS is that of Pedro Montes, who became a MAS senator in 2014. Executive Secretary of the COB from 2006 to 2012, Montes's meteoric rise in politics outside the labour movement has led some to question whether he has 'sold' the COB in exchange for political favours.[22]

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19. This sketch of the MASista labour officialdom comes from observations made during COB ampliados, formal interviews and more informal conversations with leaders and rank and file within the COB between January 2016 and May 2017.
20. Author interview with Lucio González, La Paz, 15 March 2016.
21. Author's field notes, January 2016–May 2017.
22. Author interview with Boris Villa Valdez, La Paz, 26 July 2016.

The result of this revolving door between the COB and the MAS has been the displacement of the general interests of the working classes by the political interests of the MAS, as the political project of the MAS has become the personal interest of some of the labour leadership. This has created a labour officialdom that depends for its survival on the MAS party structures rather than on the working class rank and file, which impinges on the COB's ability to challenge and counteract government actions. The debilitating effects of this labour officialdom on the COB has led to fierce internal debates, with the more radical sectors who remain outside the government's influence arguing for union independence. This group — which includes some leaders of the factory workers, the workers of the public healthcare system and National Health Fund, urban teachers, pensioners and the regional COD-Cochabamba and COD-Potosí — draws on the radical history of the COB and the *Tesis de Pulacayo* (Pulacayo Thesis), a famous revolutionary document dating from the 1940s, that posited that the independence of the working classes was key to maintaining a revolutionary path (Lora, 1946). So far, however, this position has failed to unite the CEN and has instead cemented the bifurcation between those who support the government and the more radical sectors of the labour movement.

Looking After the COB

The labour bureaucracy that formed during the neoliberal period has helped the creation of a labour officialdom linked to the MAS. Along with the union structure of the COB, the cordial relationship between the COB and the MAS has become a gain to be defended. The opportunity for the COB to contribute to proposed government legislation and projects — giving the labour movement an opportunity to influence legislation affecting the formal working classes — represents a departure from previous governments. For example, in the construction sector, the Construction Workers' Confederation (an affiliate of the COB) worked together with the Cámara de Construcción (the conglomeration of Bolivian construction firms) and the government to draw up a plan to implement health and safety procedures in the construction sector.[23] Recently the COB was able to work with the government to modify the General Employment Law to ostensibly ensure labour stability (Palacios, 2017).

One of the arguments presented by the labour officialdom to justify an amiable relationship with the government is that it is an opportunity to win such gains as social security and employment insurance from the government, improved conditions that would not be granted otherwise. Indeed,

23. Author interview with Valerio Ayaviri Lazaro, La Paz, 7 July 2016.

the leader of the construction workers, Valerio Ayaviri Lazaro, claims that it is in the interests of Bolivian capitalists to encourage a split between the government and the COB because they do not want to adhere to new regulations that the government might implement.[24] Dialogue between the COB and government ministries, in many sectors, is portrayed as a victory of past union struggles, while continued cooperation with the government (as opposed to strikes, blockages and hunger strikes) is depicted as the only way forward for the COB. This position is articulated by some leaders within the ampliados and congresses of the COB as the need to 'look after' [*cuidar*] the COB. The COB, it is argued, is only powerful because of its historical political actions, the past struggles and gains of previous generations, particularly those of the Trotskyist miners during the period 1952–1985, when they produced the majority of Bolivian exports.

Today the workers of the large transnational firms or state mining and hydrocarbon companies are responsible for almost 70 per cent of exports. Gas workers, who produce the bulk of exports, are dependent on state investment in the sector and contingent on continued exploration led by the state firm YPFB (Kaup, 2014: 1847). The continuation of neoliberal employment regimes in the majority of the labour market disciplines workers with a waged job in a sector accumulating capital. The state of constant flux for the majority of the working classes creates a large reserve pool of labour undermining the bargaining position of workers in the extractive industry. Leaders co-opted by the MAS therefore argue that because the working classes no longer possess such structural power, it would be foolish to undermine the power of the COB through ineffective strike action or breaking relationships with the MAS government.

It is not just structural power that the COB has lost, however. This defensive position is symptomatic of the broader loss of political ideology suffered during the 1980s when the radicalism of the miners was dissipated by their historic defeat and subsequent relocalization at the hands of neoliberalism. The radical politics of the miners — itself a result of Marxist reading groups in the mineshafts, a long accumulation of the experiences of violence struggles against the state and the harsh daily reality for the miners and their families in the 20th century mining encampments (see Nash, 1993) — disappeared over the neoliberal period, denying the COB the theoretical toolbox needed to mount effective struggle on behalf of the working classes over this period. The gas workers did mount a number of important struggles during the 1990s, but they never had the same ideological formation as the miners. In sum, the loss of political radicalism coupled with the conservative self-interest of some leaders has created a labour officialdom within the COB that promotes support for the government above the needs of the rank-and-file working classes.

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24. Ibid.

THE EFFECTS OF THE MAS LABOUR OFFICIALDOM

The creation of the MAS labour officialdom has debilitated the position of the labour movement under the MAS government. The ability of the COB to impact government policy or shape the political project of the MAS has been limited. The labour officialdom wedded to the political project of the MAS has undermined the ability of the COB to resist anti-labour legislation. Moreover, the COB has been unable (or unwilling) to adapt to the increasingly informal nature of wage labour experienced by the majority of the Bolivian working classes.

Despite apparent opportunities for the labour movement to have input into government projects and policy, the needs of capital still supersede those of labour. For example, despite the head of the Construction Workers' Confederation, Valerio Ayaviri Lazaro, stressing the importance of dialogue with the MAS, the government has been unwilling to impose existing labour regulations on Chinese firms working on large infrastructure projects in the country. The contracts agreed with Chinese consortia are signed under the old labour regulations from the neoliberal period, stripping workers of basic labour rights and lowering the minimum wage to 440 bolivianos a month (about US$ 64), less than a quarter of the official minimum wage.[25] The interests of international capital thus trump the supposed gains of the Bolivian workers under the MAS, and access to government officials has not enabled the Construction Workers' Confederation to force the government to address this issue.

Another example of the limited effects of dialogue with the government is the railway workers' involvement in three large-scale railway infrastructure projects: (1) the Bulo Bulo–Montero line on the border of Santa Cruz and Cochabamba; (2) a metropolitan train system between Montero and Santa Cruz; and (3) a metropolitan network linking Sacaba and the city of Cochabamba. The projects have been littered with controversy, not least because the Chinese firm China CAMC Engineering — the company implicated in the Gabriela Zapata scandal[26] — was awarded the Bulo Bulo–Mondero contract before being stripped of responsibility for the project due to negligence in December 2015 (ANF, 2015). During the National Revolutionary State the railway workers' union ran a series of technical training schools across the country, but these were closed when the 1994 Law of Capitalization privatized the national railway company, Empresa Nacional de Ferrocarriles (ENFE) (Kohl, 2004: 902–03). The railway workers have asked the government whether they can participate in the planning phase of the projects, using their technical knowledge of railways in Bolivia to act

25. Author interview with Valerio Ayaviri Lazaro, La Paz, 7 July 2016.
26. Evo Morales was accused of having a child with Gabriela Zapata, a central negotiator who was working for CAMC, negotiating contracts with the Bolivia government (McNelly, 2016).

as consultants.[27] The government has denied their request, placing the demands of Chinese firms above those of Bolivian labour to create an attractive investment environment for Chinese capital.

The conflict around the Empresa Pública Nacional Estratégica de Textiles (Enatex) — National Strategic Public Textile Company — represented the biggest test for the COB in recent years, and its failure to impact on the government decision is indicative of the effect that MAS labour officialdom has had on the movement. In May 2016 the state textiles factory run by Enatex was closed by supreme decree, with a loss of 900 jobs (Cuiza, 2016). Many inside the labour movement contend that the move mirrors the dismissals under neoliberal governments (*Erbol Digital*, 2016), labelling it 'anti-constitutional' on the grounds that it violates the enshrined right to 'employment stability'.[28] There are concerns that the supreme decree could be extended and used to close other state enterprises — anxieties that were further amplified in June 2016 by the closure of Bolivia's postal company, Empresa de Correos de Bolivia (Ecobol) (Achtenberg, 2016). In response, the COB announced the first national strikes since it entered into its pact with the government in November 2013 (*Página Siete*, 2016). Strike action was ineffective, however, and many within the labour movement argued that the need to look after the COB superseded the need to fight for the dismissed Enatex workers.[29] Despite 24–, 48– and 72–hour strikes, the COB was unable to resolve the Enatex conflict and the majority of workers were forced to take a redundancy package. The COB failed in its attempt to call an indefinite strike and was ultimately powerless to prevent the government imposing the costs of a failed state enterprise on the working classes.

The most serious shortcoming of the COB under the MAS has been its inability to tackle increasing precarity — determined by income levels, employment stability and access to social security (Escóbar de Pabón et al., 2014) — among the Bolivian working classes. Informality has increased from 59.7 per cent of the employed population in 2006 to 62 per cent in 2014 under Evo Morales (Arze, 2016). As noted above, the majority of working class Bolivians work in the tertiary sector (70 per cent), with 35 per cent working in commerce, 20 per cent in services and 11 per cent in transport. These sectors have low job security, limited access to social services and consequently high levels of precarity. Part-time work and underemployment remain prominent aspects of labour conditions under the MAS (Escóbar de Pabón et al., 2014), with workers in constant flux between employment activities and unemployment (Webber, 2016).

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27. Author interview with Antonio Severiche Brosque and Jorge Márquez, leaders of the Railway Workers' Confederation, La Paz, 5 July 2016.
28. Author interview with executive secretary of the COB Guido Mitma, La Paz, 5 October 2016.
29. Author's field notes from COB ampliados, June–September 2016.

Table 5. Axis Cities: Employment by Sector of Labour Market, 2001–11 (%)

Sector of the Labour Market	2001	2011
State	10.1	8.3
Business	25.1	25.4
Informal Business	13.8	22.4
Family	45.5	40.6
Domestic Service	5.5	3.3

Source: adapted from Escóbar de Pabón et al. (2014: 33), cited in Webber (2016: 1869)

Table 6. Axis Cities: Quality of Work by Labour Market Sector, 2001–11 (%)

	2001			2011		
Sector of Labour Market	Non-precarious	Moderately Precarious	Extremely Precarious	Non-precarious	Moderately Precarious	Extremely Precarious
Total	**22.1**	**55.4**	**22.5**	**20.9**	**27.5**	**51.6**
State	50.7	46.5	2.8	40.8	52.0	7.2
Business	28.7	54.8	16.5	20.4	50.8	28.8
Informal Business	9.9	59.8	30.3	10.5	51.1	38.3
Family	18.4	51.1	30.5	22.7	1.8	75.5
Domestic Service	–	–	100	1.2	1.7	97.1

Source: Escóbar de Pabón et al. (2014: 36)

Economists from the Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Laboral y Agrario (CEDLA), Silvia Escóbar de Pabón, Bruno Rojas and Carlos Arze, have broken the economy down to examine the material shape of informality (Escóbar de Pabón et al., 2014). Splitting the economy into five parts — the state, business, informal business, family and domestic service — they show that between 2001 and 2011 state sector employment has declined by almost 2 per cent, while informal businesses' share of the labour market has jumped from 13.8 per cent to 22.4 per cent (see Table 5). If we take the state and business sectors as proxies for the formal economy, argues Webber (2016: 1870), then employment has been increasingly informalized and concentrated where rates of extreme precariousness (that is, low income, high employment insecurity and limited access to social services) are at their highest (see Table 6). Indeed, according to CEDLA's analysis, extreme precariousness has increased from 22.5 per cent in 2001 to 52.5 per cent in 2011 (Table 6). This insecurity, coupled with the extension and intensification of the working day, contends Webber (2016: 1870), 'operates politically as an invisible mechanism of control and discipline of the urban labour force', further undermining workers' rights.

This growing precarity is partly a result of the decoupling of employment sectors from sectors of capital accumulation. The economic policy of the MAS has focused on generating a strong internal market through limited redistribution from the extractive industries to employment sectors. Through García Linera's (2008) conception of the 'plural economy', the government

Table 7. Sectoral Structure of Exports by Period, 2002–14 (%)

Economic Activity	2002–05	2011–14
Hydrocarbons	35	51
Mineral Mining	14	17
Manufacturing	45	27
Agriculture	5	6

Source: adapted from Arze (2016: 7)

has deciphered two main types of sectors within the economy: (1) strategic sectors (hydrocarbons; mining; energy); and (2) employment sectors (agriculture; industry; tourism; commerce) (Ministry of Development Planning, 2006: 91). The MAS's plan is primarily to shift the surplus created by the strategic sectors to the employment sectors through redistributive mechanisms;[30] the improvement of infrastructure, especially roads; and support for agricultural sectors. The government argues that this redistribution will increase the purchasing power of Bolivian workers and in turn create internal demand, an essential prerequisite for future industrialization.

During the Morales regime hydrocarbons and mineral mining have augmented their share of Bolivian exports, growing from 35 and 14 per cent of exports between 2002 and 2005, to 51 and 17 per cent respectively over the period 2011–14. Simultaneously, manufacturing's share of exports has fallen from 45 per cent to 27 per cent over the same period (see Table 7). Capital accumulation is being increasingly isolated from domestic markets and contained in capital-intensive industries with few forward or backward linkages. Moreover, the ever-deeper insertion of Bolivia into the global market as a primary commodity producer makes the economy more susceptible to fluctuations in global commodity prices and increases reliance on imports of foreign manufactured goods (Arze, 2016), undermining domestic production and aligning the interests of the state with those of international capital (Coronil, 1997). Under the MAS, the underlying patterns of ownership and accumulation have remained untouched, allowing multinationals to profit and continuing the state's role as guarantor of private property and a stable investment environment (Webber, 2016).

This is particularly problematic as the COB has no proposals to tackle the problem of the informalized nature of work or the growing reliance on extractivism other than an undefined 'reactivation of the productive apparatus'.[31] Which sectors would be targeted, where the technology would come from and how those sectors would become competitive on the global stage are left unaddressed, making this an empty proposal. The COB makes

30. The conditional cash transfer programmes Renta Dignidad, Bono Juancito Pinto, and Bono Juana Azurduy, targeting pensioners, children and young mothers respectively.
31. This was a recurrent theme in my interviews with Bolivian labour leaders and is an often-reproduced motif of the labour movement in press releases and interviews.

little effort to integrate informalized sectors into its organization or represent their interests. Many of the concessions made to the COB only affect workers in the waged sector: the minimum wage has risen from 500 bolivianos a month before Morales was elected to over 2,000 a month currently (*EA Bolivia*, 2017); and the *doble aguinaldo* (double bonus, introduced in 2013) gives waged workers two months extra pay if GDP growth is above 4.5 per cent (Office of the President, 2013: Art. 1). These concessions have only widened the divide between those represented by the COB and the majority of Bolivia's working classes. The concessions appease the narrow bases represented by the COB without contesting the trends of increasing informality and precarity in the economy, which are left unchallenged, confirming that the COB does not represent the general interests of the Bolivian working classes.

CONCLUSION

Despite the promise of a radical overhaul of the neoliberal political economy, the economic policies of Evo Morales have maintained a division between the growth-producing sectors of the economy and the nodes of employment. At the same time, and in spite of this apparent lack of improvements for the Bolivian working classes, the COB has become an important political ally of the government. Over the past 10 years the MAS has managed to assimilate parts of the COB through awarding political positions to members of the leadership, and offering the appearance of cooperation by using a socialist rhetoric. This has created a labour officialdom within the upper echelons of the COB whose personal interests align with the political aims of the MAS.

This development has had detrimental effects on the labour movement under Morales. The defence of the government's political project has taken precedence over the needs of the rank-and-file working classes, severely undermining the ability of the COB to defend the workers they represent in the face of government anti-labour legislation. Most Bolivians continue to work in informal, precarious settings, and the informal economy continues to create most employment opportunities. The COB's lack of engagement with growing trends of informalization and precariousness means it fails to represent the majority of Bolivia's workers. Its response to these tendencies is the vague maxim of 'reactivation of the productive apparatus', which ignores the structure of Bolivia's economy and its insertion into the global capitalist system as a primary commodities producer, and does not present a concrete programme of how industrialization would be achieved. In short, although ostensibly the COB has improved its position vis-à-vis the marginal place it was assigned under neoliberalism, with access to government ministers and rhetorical flourishes in its direction from the MAS government, it ultimately remains incapable of representing the majority of Bolivian workers.

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